



THE NATIONAL VACANT/ABANDONED BUILDING FIRE PROBLEM

Fires in improperly secured vacant or abandoned buildings are a constant threat to firefighters, citizens and private property alike. We believe that these problems are manageable once communities recognize the urgency of the problem and act.

We are committed to making the facts and solutions known to government officials and private citizens alike so that a solution is found and pursued.

GERARD NAYLIS, PRESIDENT, IAAI
USFA ARSON AWARENESS WEEK PARTNERSHIP

Abandoned Building Arson Facts

- During the period 1993 through 1997 there were an annual average of 12,200 fires in buildings coded by responding fire departments as vacant. Because properties may be coded for their intended use rather than their current status, these figures probably underestimate the extent of the problem.¹
- These fires resulted in an average of 10 civilian deaths and \$73 million in direct property damage each year.¹
- Over 70% of fires in vacant property were incendiary or suspicious.²
- These fires accounted for more than four-fifths of the direct property losses in these buildings.²
- Twice as many child-play fires occurred in these buildings as in educational properties.²
- Fires in vacant buildings are dangerous to firefighters and often spread to occupied, insured structures.
- In 1999, Worcester firefighters entered a vacant, burning cold storage building to search for a homeless couple reported to have been in the building. Several firefighters became disoriented, and others went to their aid. Six became trapped and died in the fire. The homeless couple had left the premises after the fire began.³
- A 1987 abandoned Detroit warehouse fire killed one firefighter when it flashed over. The fire spread to an occupied paper and supply company. Two more firefighters died in the second structure when a wall collapsed as they tried to limit the fire's growth. Prior to the incident, the fire department had been called to extinguish several small fires in the vacant building. These fires had been started by vagrants for warmth.²

- In 1999 an arson by two juveniles in a vacant apartment block in Holyoke, Massachusetts spread to 11 other buildings resulting in a multi-million dollar loss including a cathedral.¹
- Embers from a 1994 vacant Illinois warehouse fire ignited a plant a mile away from the fire. Because the local firefighters were still fighting the warehouse fire, plant employees had to use extinguishers until firefighters from another community arrived.²
- The injury *rate* per fire is 5.6 firefighter injuries per 100 special structure (including vacant buildings) fires compared to 1.9 injuries per fire at structure fires in general.⁴
- Because children and the homeless may frequent vacant buildings, firefighters cannot automatically assume these buildings are empty. These fires can be extremely hazardous to firefighters.
- Arson is the second leading cause of death by fire in the United States-topped only by smoking-and the main cause of property damage due to fires.
- Arsonists killed more than 500 Americans in 1996 and inflicted direct property damage totaling more than \$2 billion.
- One of every four fires-some 500,000-that occur in the U.S. each year are arson.

Source:

1. *The U.S. Fire Problem Overview Report: Leading Causes and Other Patterns and Trends*, Marty Ahrens, NFPA, April 2000
2. *Special Data Information Package, Structure Fires in Vacant or Idle Properties, or Properties Under Construction, Demolition or Renovation*, NFPA, MAY 2000
3. "1999 Firefighter Fatality Report" Rita F. Fahy and Paul LeBlanc *NFPA Journal*(, July/August 2000.
4. *Patterns of Firefighter Fireground Injuries*, Michael J. Karter, Jr., NFPA February 2000
5. *Drug Related Fires in the United States – A Preliminary Report of Research on the Relationship between Drug Activity and Arson in Selected U.S. Cities*, Donna B. Towerman and Thomas J. Towerman, Project report sponsored by the Bureau of Alcohol, tobacco and Firearms, Virginia Commonwealth University, Department of Justice and Risk Administration, 1993.





BEING A GOOD SPOKESPERSON

Tips for Interviewing

Whether you are doing a media interview on camera, on the radio or over the telephone, be aware of the way you appear. Speak clearly, speak in positive terms, keep your message clear and consistent, and stay in control of the interview.

When possible, try to get your points across even if the reporter doesn't ask you directly. It's a good idea to stick to the facts when being interviewed and stay away from opinions. Here are some guidelines:

Be Prepared

Know your material and review related issues that may be tied to your story. For telephone interviews, have written material right in front of you in case you need to check a statistic.

Provide the reporter with two sets of the *Arson Facts* and the *National Vacant/Abandoned Building Fire Problem* included in this media kit plus pre-printed quotes to minimize the possibility of factual error in the story.

It's a good idea to spend time prior to the interview speaking with the reporter about the vacant building problem in general so they understand the big picture. Avoid jargon! Don't assume the reporter has any particular expertise in this area. We've found that most reporters want to do an accurate, interesting story and they often work on tight deadlines so be on time yourself!

Tying your message to events in the local area will help you establish the story's relevance and get on the air. Do some research with local fire departments and building commissioners.

Decide before the interview what core message you want to communicate and lead the reporter to that information. Have in mind a strong closing statement that sums up the most important points you want to communicate. Repeat this information even if you've already said it before, because opening and closing statements are the easiest for editors to locate.

It's okay to say, "I don't know."

If you are asked a question you don't know the answer to, say so. It is much better to tell a reporter you don't know than to "guesstimate" and be embarrassed later. Tell the reporter you'll try to find the answer and be sure to follow up in a timely manner.

There's No Such Thing As "Off the Record."

Speaking off the record with a reporter can be risky and is not advisable. Stick to the facts and what you plan to address ahead of time. Professional reporters who have an ethical track record will sometimes agree to the following *ground rules* prior to the interview:

- On the Record: As soon as someone says, *I'm a reporter*, you are on notice that anything you say can be used in print, quoting you by name, title and company affiliation.
- Not-for-Attrition: If you want to answer a reporter's question but don't want to be quoted by name say so first.
- Off-the-Record: Technically means that you don't want to see the information you are providing in print.
- Background: You won't be quoted directly but the reporter can take the information you provide and confirm it with another source.

At the end of the interview ask the reporter to read their notes back to you.

TV Tips

Prepare for on-camera interviews, but don't rehearse a script, as the reporter may arrive with completely different questions than you expect. Thoroughly review any pertinent information, statistics, etc., and practice framing answers. Unless you are directed otherwise, look at the reporter, not into the camera. Maintain eye contact. Don't fidget, use your hands excessively or rock or swivel in your chair. If you have access to a video camera, practice with it so you can spot any characteristics which detract from your ability to communicate or which make you seem insincere.





MEDIA CAMPAIGN

The biggest goal of Arson Awareness Week is to focus public attention on one severe national problem that contributes to arson. The life safety and property exposure hazard created by unsecured vacant buildings in our cities and towns is as obvious as it is urgent. We've seen this issue swept under the rug for far too long. It's time now to act.

Your leadership role is critical

We need to get this story into the media everywhere there is an arson prone vacant building. Happily, this is the type of story that has immense media appeal because it contains strong visual images and the possibility of a solution. We have put together a strategy that will enable you to get this story "on the air" and "in print" in your area.

This year, for the first time in history, the two most prominent organizations dealing with fire and arson will team up to take this program higher than its ever gone before. In the media kit there is a list of IAAI/IASIU state leaders. We urge you, as a first step, to call your counterpart to discuss a preliminary strategy based on these points.

Preliminary Strategy

- Identify the major media outlets in your area particularly a television station and a daily newspaper.
- Identify the community closest to the media outlets with the most obvious vacant building problem.
- Call the municipal fire department and ask to speak with the Fire Prevention Officer or Fire Chief. Set an appointment where both of you, if possible, can meet with him/her to discuss implementing this program. Provide several posters. The threat of vacant buildings and fire is most extreme to firefighters. It is safe to say every firefighter in this country knows what happened in Worcester. The fire service will support this initiative because it goes to the heart of firefighters safety and fire prevention.
- Consider involving IAAI/IASIU members who live or work in the community to help make connections and get results.
- The Fire Prevention Officer and Fire Chief usually are on a first name basis with broadcast media and print reporters covering fires and other emergencies. The best way to access the media is by interesting these reporters who in turn will help sell the story to their editor.
- The most effective messenger you have for this issue is the fire service itself. If the fire chief or other department member agrees to be the spokesperson for these media event's you have just scored a major victory. See if you can arrange to get an engine or pump company to bring apparatus to the scene of the interviews to pose as a backdrop and also to

provide possible additional interviews with line fighters about their opinion on dangerous buildings and their job.

- Select a building already taken by the city for taxes to avoid issues with any derelict building owner. The main point of this campaign is that these buildings are dangerous, not which building you chose, to illustrate the point.
- Gather statistics about how many vacant buildings there are in the local area and how many fires have occurred in these. These can be easily obtained through the City Engineer or Building Inspector's Office or the community's newspaper. Highlight local conditions to the local media.

With the fire service, explain that the National Arson Awareness Week Program is the opening round of a three-prong attack on the U.S. vacant building problem. The second prong is a web based "tool kit" funded by a FEMA grant scheduled for release this summer. IAAI, IASIU and fire service members are directly involved in its creation. The toolkit will contain technical information and resources for securing dangerous buildings. The third prong is the National Arson Forum scheduled for late fall 2001.

Here, the major players concerned with fire; the fire service, State Fire Marshals, the insurance industry and our elected representatives will come together in Washington, D.C. to learn about successful model vacant building mitigation programs and to support a consensus resolution that will be delivered to Congress and the state legislatures.

The impact of this campaign hinges on public support and political pressure to change. The importance of your part in this cannot be overemphasized. Here are some ideas on getting this issue out to the public.

SUGGESTIONS FOR GETTING "AIR/PRINT"

1. Staging a "Media Event"

- Walk the reporter/film crew through a derelict vacant building containing old furniture, trash, cardboard boxes and other easily ignitable materials. Explain the obvious – anyone from a small child to a mentally ill person with a match could set that building on fire. Here are some other points you could make:
- Show how easy the building can be entered by simply walking through an unlocked door or pulling a piece of cheap pressboard off a window.
- Explain how open stairwells, holes in ceilings, holes in plaster/drywall allow the fire to get to structural framing and increase the likelihood of early collapse.
- Show evidence of vandalism, theft of building components and broken windows. Explain these will increase the rate of fire spread while at the same time weakening the building.
- Point out that if the building is close to other structures a conflagration could easily develop because there is no one inside the vacant buildings to report small fires and, as a result, they often go out of control.
- Emphasize firefighters are three times as likely to be injured fighting a vacant building fire as an ordinary structure fire and that seventy percent of the fires in such buildings are classified incendiary or suspicious in national fire statistics.

- Point out evidence of criminal activity such as drug paraphernalia, evidence of trespass with sleeping or cooking materials and “urban mining” (stealing plumbing fixtures, copper pipe, mantle pieces, etc). Show unsanitary conditions and evidence of rodents & insects. Emphasize the effect on the neighborhood through interviews of people living nearby.

2. Demonstration

Demonstrate how to effectively board-up a vacant building so that it is virtually impossible to enter. The pamphlet in the media kit entitled “Board Up Procedures” shows how to mothball a building so its risk of catching fire is virtually zero. This same procedure has proven effective in the toughest cities in this country. It works, and can be demonstrated and explained with minimum effort by simply following the directions.

3. Show Poster

Show the Arson Awareness Week poster and provide details about the scope of the vacant building threat from “The National Vacant/Abandoned Building Fire Problem” fact sheet in the media kit.

4. Show Evaluation Form Being Used

Show an inspector using the “Vacant/Abandoned Building Evaluation Form” to access deteriorated features of a vacant building.

5. Explain Building Hazards

Have a firefighter explain problems with the building (holes in floors, missing staircases, etc) that could be deadly to local firefighters in the event of a fire.

6. Involve Fire Departments

Have an engine fire company pull up to a vacant building and check it for security. Another idea would be for the fire company to report a newly vacant building to the city code inspector to be added to the inventory of distressed properties.





PROCLAMATION

"National Arson Awareness Week"

WHEREAS, Arson is a serious crime that affects each and every person and can only be stopped when citizens realize the severe damage that arson causes; and

WHEREAS, Cities, communities and neighborhoods are blighted by Arson which results in erosion of the tax base and loss of employment; and

WHEREAS, Arson has disrupted our educational and manufacturing systems with the destruction irreplaceable buildings and artifacts; and

WHEREAS, Natural resources are rendered useless for long periods of time or are completely destroyed; and

WHEREAS, Countless human injuries and deaths result in the needless tragedies caused by acts of Arson; and

WHEREAS, A large percentage of property insurance premiums are used to cover the losses from Arson, and tax dollars must be used to pay for fire extinguishment and the investigation of these malicious acts, which is a senseless waste of our precious resources when the majority of the public must directly bare the burden of an individual's criminal action; and

WHEREAS, The financial loss annually due to Arson reaches billions of dollars, which does not include indirect losses, both emotional and financial, including funerals, medical and legal cost, wages, business interruption, fire fighting and law enforcement efforts which together exceed the direct losses many fold; and

WHEREAS, Public awareness is one of the specific responsibilities of the International Association of Arson Investigators, Inc.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT PROCLAIMED, that The International Association of Arson Investigators, Inc., Board of Directors meeting in Executive Session on November 1, 1985, in Atlanta, Georgia, hereby proclaims the week, beginning on May 4, 1986, as "National Arson Awareness Week," and the first full week of May shall be so designated each year thereafter.

By action of the Board of Directors
International Association of Arson Investigators, Inc.
November 1, 1985
Atlanta, Georgia



PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS

TARGET ARSON - DON'T GET BURNED 15-second PSA

Here's a frightening fact: three of every four fires in vacant buildings are officially classified as arson or suspicious. It's true! Firefighters are three times more likely to be injured fighting a fire in a vacant building than in an ordinary structure fire. It's past the time to demand action to secure all dangerous vacant buildings in our community!

Call City Hall and your local fire department and find out what you can do to help prevent fires in vacant, unsecured buildings.

TARGET ARSON - DON'T GET BURNED 15-second PSA

Ever think that an arson fire could cost your job, your home, or maybe even your life? Thousands learn the hard way every year. May 6 through 12 is *National Arson Awareness Week*. Get involved with your local fire and police departments and find out what you can do to help stop arson in vacant buildings in your community.

ARSON BURNS EVERYONE 15-second PSA

In the time it takes to hear this sentence, more than 600 dollars worth of property will be set on fire. That's why the first week in May has been designated National Arson Awareness Week. If you know or suspect that an arson crime has been committed, contact your local fire or police department. You can make a difference!

TARGET ARSON - DON'T GET BURNED 30-second PSA

It's easy to see that long vacant or abandon buildings create many problems: they attract vagrants, drug dealers, rats and trash. But did you know that three in every four fires in vacant buildings are classified as arson or suspicious cause? Did you know firefighters are three times more likely to be injured fighting fire in a vacant building than a regular structure fire?

The United States Fire Administration, the International Association of Arson Investigators and the International Association of Special Investigation Units need your help to reduce the danger posed to people and property by these fires. Please help by working with your elected representatives and your local fire department to make certain that vacant buildings are secured against trespass.

May 6 through 12 is *National Arson Awareness Week*. If you see a vacant and unsecured building in your neighborhood or community don't turn away! Contact your Mayor or local fire department and find out what can be done to stop an arson!

TARGET ARSON - DON'T GET BURNED 30-second PSA

There is nothing more tragic than seeing what you hold precious destroyed by a fire. Imagine your most treasured possessions, your home or business, the people you love, injured or destroyed. Imagine if someone intentionally set the fire? That's arson. Every year hundreds of people are killed, thousands injured and upwards of two billion dollars lost in property in this country alone. This is a big problem.

You can help prevent arson by properly securing buildings and removing ignitable fuels away from the edges of buildings and locking down dumpster lids. Keep a close eye on any vacant properties that are in your neighborhood or community. Three in every four fires in vacant or abandoned properties are arson or of a suspicious cause.

May 6 through 12 is *National Arson Awareness Week*. Work with City Hall and your local fire and police departments to help lock arsonist up!





RESOLUTION ON IMPROVING THE SYSTEM OF MANAGING ABANDONED BUILDINGS IN OUR CITIES AND TOWNS

WHEREAS, Abandoned unsecured buildings are a constant and major problem adversely affecting fire safety, sanitary conditions, property values and public safety in every city and town where they exist; and

WHEREAS, Abandoned unsecured buildings are the single most dangerous firefighting environment for firefighters and are the single highest location of firefighter injuries and deaths; and

WHEREAS, Abandoned unsecured buildings create an enormous financial strain that many communities are unable to deal with; and

WHEREAS, Abandoned unsecured buildings are most apt to be found in poorer communities and those communities with the least ability to effectively deal with them; now therefore be it Resolved, that the under-signed organizations representing public safety, property insurance and government commit themselves to affecting permanent change in applicable codes, opening public and private funding and resources and advocating for government prioritization and action that recognizes the emergency posed by vacant unsecured buildings and the need to address management of them until the level of danger is successfully brought under control.

Resolved, that a copy of these resolutions be transmitted to leaders in our legislatures and communities to support action.

Gerald Naylis, President
International Association of Arson Investigators

Tommy Short, President
International Association of Special Investigation Units

Adopted, April 15, 2001



SAMPLE EDITORIAL

FIRE IN VACANT BUILDINGS: A NATIONAL PROBLEM WITH A LOCAL SOLUTION

Just a year ago a pair of firefighters entered a burning vacant warehouse in Worcester, Massachusetts to rescue two homeless people reportedly living there. A short time later each radioed they were lost in heavy smoke and were running out of air. Four more fighters rushed in to rescue them. All six died in the next few minutes.

What happened in Worcester stunned this nation and focused attention, again, on the horrendous hazard of unsecured vacant buildings. The theme of this year's Arson Awareness Week, *It Can Happen Anywhere*, is meant to convey that message; anywhere a vacant building exists there is a very real danger another Worcester could occur.

We all know vacant buildings often become sites for serious felony crimes. Only the poor and elderly usually have first-hand experience with the depressing effect dilapidated buildings have on their neighborhood or how quickly such buildings become magnets for trash, dope dealers, the homeless, curious children and fire.

There are thousands of fires in vacant buildings each year in this country. Three in every four of these fires are officially classified suspicious or incendiary. To make matters worse, firefighters are three times as likely to be injured fighting fire in a vacant building as in an ordinary structure fire.

Targeting vacant buildings for fire and arson prevention is the single most effective thing we can do to prevent the threat to firefighters, private citizens and other property. This boils down to securing the building against entry by unauthorized persons. Properly secured, any value it has can be preserved against damage by vandals, the weather and fire.

The first step in the process is to demand action by City Hall to make each vacant building secure by compelling property owners to comply with sensible fire and sanitary code requirements. Using existing civil and criminal penalties in conjunction with government and private redevelopment funding offers the best opportunity we have to control blight and ultimately abandonment.

Make no mistake about this - if the property owner fails or cannot be located the city ultimately has the responsibility to remove the threat. It is often possible to recover any investment by placing a lien on the property. Funding must be found to accomplish this quickly or we risk still another version of what happened in Worcester.

More than half a million fires were deliberately set in America last year, and over half of those fires were set by youngsters and juveniles under the age of 18. Those fires killed more than 500 people and destroyed

about \$2 billion worth of property. Fires in abandoned or vacant buildings played a role in this epidemic.

Firefighters around the country do the very best they can with short budgets and even shorter public attention spans. They are our true heroes, day in and day out. But they can't do it alone and we must not put them in the face of grave danger by doing nothing..

One opportunity to make our own community more aware of the fight against arson begins today. It's called National Arson Awareness Week, and the theme this year is "*It Can Happen Anywhere.*"

Gerard Naylis, President of the International Association of Arson Investigators and Tommy Short, President of the International Association of Special Investigation Units, have both said *"The lives and property lost as a result of arson needlessly reduces the quality of life for everyone. The diligence and hard work of both public and private investigators towards the identification and reduction of arson should be recognized and supported by everyone."*

Arson wears many faces. Arson is a troubled kid with the lighter . . . a hate monger with an ax to grind . . . a gang member seeking to prove his toughness . . . an urban disease that eats away at the core of our cities . . . and pestilence that further blights poor rural communities.

Those statistics are frightening-and sobering. National Arson Awareness Week should make all of us perk up our ears and respond to our local fire departments call for community support in the war against arson.

The most effective way of combating arson, of course, is simply to prevent it from happening. That takes more than just federal dollars, it takes bodies of committed people. Everyone in the Greater [insert name of city] area need to get involved in this worthy cause. Working together, we can make real progress in snuffing out a cowardly act that ruins far too many lives in this country.





SAMPLE SPEECH

Arson remains one of this nation's most dangerous and costly threats for citizens and their property alike. The latest statistics from the National Fire Protection Association reveal more than 400 hundred Americans die, thousands more are seriously injured and an estimated \$1.7 billion dollars in property is destroyed each year in arson fires.

Arson burns without discriminating between the elderly or infants or between businesses, homes, churches or vacant buildings.

Just over a year ago a pair of firefighters entered a burning vacant warehouse in Worcester, Massachusetts to rescue two homeless people reportedly living there. A short time later each radioed they were lost in heavy smoke and were running out of air. Four more fighters rushed in to rescue them. All six died in the next few minutes.

What happened in Worcester stunned this nation and focused attention, once again, on the horrendous hazard of unsecured vacant buildings and fire. The theme of this year's Arson Awareness Week, *It Can Happen Anywhere*, is meant to convey that message; *anywhere an unsecured vacant building exists there is a very real danger another Worcester tragedy could occur.*

We all know vacant buildings are the sites of serious crimes. In rundown neighborhoods, the poor and elderly have had first-hand experience with the depressing effect that dilapidated and abandoned buildings have on their neighborhood and how quickly such buildings become magnets for trash, dope dealers, rodents, the homeless, curious children and fire.

There are thousands of fires in vacant buildings each year in this country. Seventy percent of these fires are officially classified as suspicious or arson. To make matters worse, firefighters are three times more likely to be injured fighting fire in a vacant building as in an ordinary structure fire. We can all agree that vacant, unsecured buildings are an unacceptable risk to people and property in this community.

Targeting vacant buildings for fire and arson prevention is the single most effective thing we can do to control the danger. This boils down to securing the building against illegal entry and clearing combustibles from its perimeter and porches. It can often be that simple. Properly secured, any value the building has is preserved for redevelopment and protected against inevitable damage by vandals, the weather and arsonists.

The first step in the process is to alert your elected officials and your local fire and police department to unsecured vacant buildings in your neighborhood. Report any suspicious activity in and around these structures promptly.

Community leaders must address the most hazardous buildings first. They should require property owners to comply with sensible fire and sanitary codes and use the civil and criminal laws and penalties along with

public and private redevelopment funding to expedite control of blight and ultimately to stop building abandonment.

The price for doing nothing is enormous. More than half a million fires were deliberately set in America last year, and over half of those fires were set by youngsters and juveniles under the age of 18. Vacant buildings played a major role in this epidemic.

Gerard Naylis, President of the International Association of Arson Investigators and Tommy Short, President of the International Association of Special Investigation Units, have said *“The lives and property lost as a result of arson needlessly reduces the quality of life for everyone. The diligence and hard work of both public and private investigators towards the identification and reduction of arson should be recognized and supported by everyone.”*

The most effective way of combating arson is the same method used to control crime - prevention. That takes more than just federal dollars, it takes bodies of committed people. Everyone in the Greater [insert name of city] area needs to get involved in this worthy cause.

If you are living or working near a dangerous vacant building report this problem to your mayor’s office, building and code department and the fire department.

Support the Neighborhood Watch program.

Remember, Arson Stops With You!

For additional information on arson prevention, call the International Association of Arson Investigators, Inc. (314) 739-4224 or the International Association of Special Investigation Units (410) 933 - 3480 or contact the U.S. Fire Administration at (888) 603-3100.





TIPS ON WRITING AN EFFECTIVE LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Every day the newspapers are filled with articles and editorials concerning arson. As you read, notice how the issues are presented, and consider these three questions:

1. How do I feel about what is being said?
2. Is there information not contained in the article or editorial that is necessary to understanding the issue?
3. Is the information accurate:

The answers to these questions will help you decide how to respond to press coverage through letters to the editor. The editorial pages give you the opportunity to speak out on the arson and fraud issues that concern you. In a letter to the editor you can:

1. Correct inaccurate or misleading coverage.
2. Write to educate or inform readers.
3. Agree or disagree with a position previously expressed
4. Voice your opinions on issues you feel strongly about
5. Persuade readers to act in a specific way.

Here are some hints to help you express your views more effectively.

1. The influence of your communication depends on how well you make your point. Make sure that your letter is clear and concise. The reader may lose interest in a long, rambling letter.
2. Support your arguments with specific examples or statistical evidence.
3. Use your knowledge to help increase the public's understanding of the arson problem.
4. Don't insult or attack the reporter, the paper, or the author of the piece to which you are responding. The purpose of your letter is to correct inaccurate material or disagree with a person's view, not to personally offend the writer. A letter that is positive, reasonable and offers solutions or alternatives is generally more effective.
5. Proofread your letter carefully.
6. Remember to include your name, address and phone number. This is important because most newspapers will want to contact you to verify that you wrote the letter. The paper will not publish your address and phone number, just your name and association.



Photographs provided by Associated Press, Worcester Telegram and Gazette and the Worcester Fire Department.

DANGER!

Beware of Abandoned and Vacant Buildings

In 1999, Worcester, Ma., firefighters entered a vacant, burning cold storage building to search for a homeless couple reportedly in the building.

Six firefighters became trapped and died in the fire.

More than 70% of fires in vacant or abandoned buildings are incendiary or suspicious.

IT CAN HAPPEN ANYWHERE

There are more than 12,000 fires in vacant structures reported each year in the United States resulting in \$73 million in direct property damage.

Because children and the homeless may frequent vacant structures, firefighters cannot automatically assume these buildings are empty.

For more information on securing vacant buildings, call the National Arson Prevention Clearinghouse at 1-888-603-3100, visit www.usaf.fema.gov/ or interFIRE at www.interfire.org.



U.S. Fire Administration

National Arson Prevention Initiative



STOP the use of empty buildings as targets for arsonists, as crack houses, as hang outs for gangs, as garbage dumps, and as temporary shelters for the homeless.

These procedures are intended to protect buildings that are temporarily vacant pending rehabilitation and use.

"HARDENING THE TARGET" BOARD UP PROCEDURES

Protecting valuable buildings from the weather and from illegal entry can be accomplished by improving security, organizing block watches, improving lighting, periodic patrols, and by following these directions.

1. DISCONNECT ALL UTILITIES AT THE STREET

- Turn off water at the street and drain the system to its lowest point. Leave faucets open and put anti-freeze in all traps containing water.
- Have the utility company disconnect electricity at the street and remove and cap meters.
- Shut off LNG supply at the street. Disconnect and remove LPG and heating oil tanks.

2. REMOVE ALL FLAMMABLES AND COMBUSTIBLES FROM INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE BUILDING

- Remove all upholstered furniture, combustible materials and trash from the building, including the basement and attic.
- Remove trash and trash containers and combustible furniture from exterior stairwells, porches, fire escapes and outbuildings.
- Remove shrubbery and vegetation that could support or spread a fire.

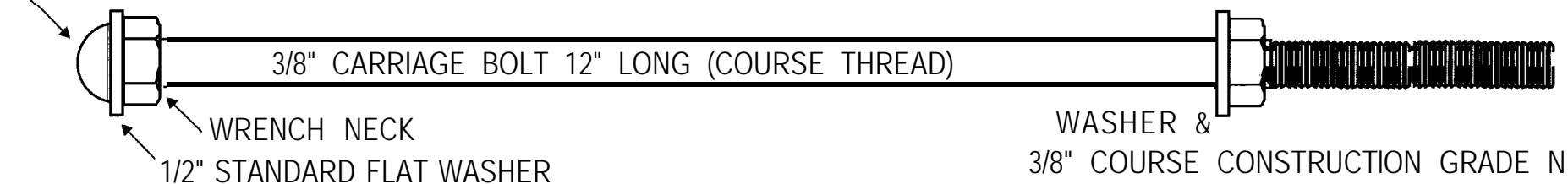
3. SECURE THE BUILDING TO PREVENT ENTRY

- Search the entire building to ensure that it is unoccupied.
- Remove doors and storm windows and place in storage.

DETERMINING HOW MUCH PROTECTION IS NEEDED

- Openings in the basement, first floor doors and windows and any point of entry accessible from a porch, fire escape or other potential climbing point require additional security measures. These openings should be barricaded with plywood, 2x4s, bolts and nails.
- Openings that are at least 10' from ground level which are not accessible from a porch, fire escape, roof, or other climbing point can be secured with nails in each brace, and every 12" around the perimeter. For these openings the plywood should be fitted so that it rests snugly against the exterior frame, butting up to the siding on wood frame buildings and up to the brickwork on brick buildings. It may be necessary to remove the staff bead so this fit can be flush and tight.

NOTE: USE ROUNDED HEAD



BOARDING UP

- Cut plywood to fit over the window and door openings, flush with outside of the molding.
Note: For buildings with metal door and window frames the alternative is to cut the plywood and 2x4s to fit the inside of the door frame buffed up against the band molding.
- Cut the 2x4s to fit the horizontal dimension of the plywood. You will need two 2x4 exterior and two interior braces for each window and three sets for each door.
For buildings with metal doors and window frames the 2x4s for the outside will be cut to the dimensions of the plywood, fitting inside the door frame, against the band molding. For the inside the 2x4s will be cut to the outside dimension of the door or window frame.
- Pre drill 3/8th inch holes in the plywood and the braces.
- The holes will be placed approximately 1/3 of the length of the brace from each outside edge of the door and window jam.
- The two window braces will be placed 1/3 of the distance from the top and the bottom of the window.
- The three door braces will be placed; one in the center of the doorway, and one half the distance from the center to the top and to the bottom of the doorway.

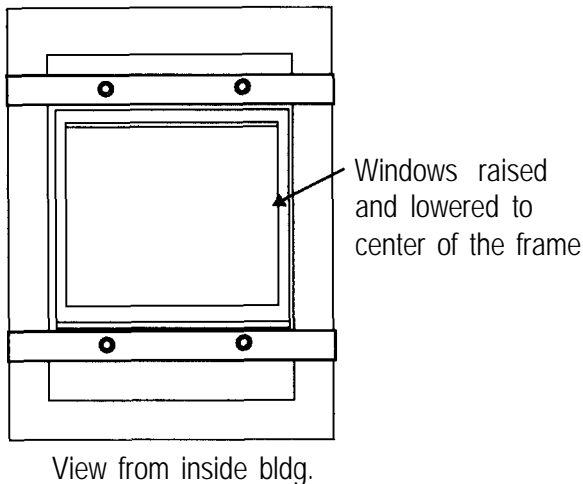
- Place the plywood over the exterior opening and nail to the frame.
For metal frames place the plywood and braces inside the frame against the band molding.
- Place the 2x4 braces over the interior and exterior of the door or window.
- Place the large washer over the carriage bolt and place the bolt through the holes.
- Place washer and nut inside and tighten securely. Torque the nut so that it slightly compresses the interior 2x4.

After all entrances are secured, the interior worker should exit the building, using a ladder, through a window, if such exists, at least 10 feet above the ground. Nail or screw a plywood sheet over the worker's exit. Patrol the building periodically to check the security.

MATERIALS NEEDED

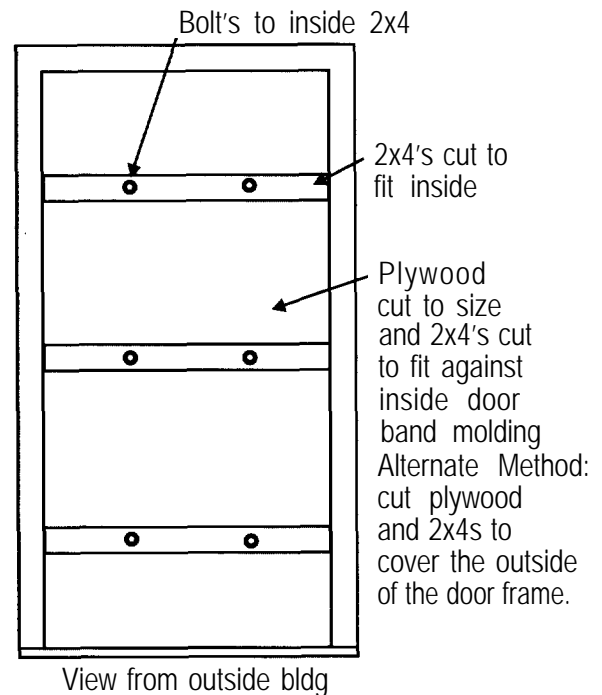
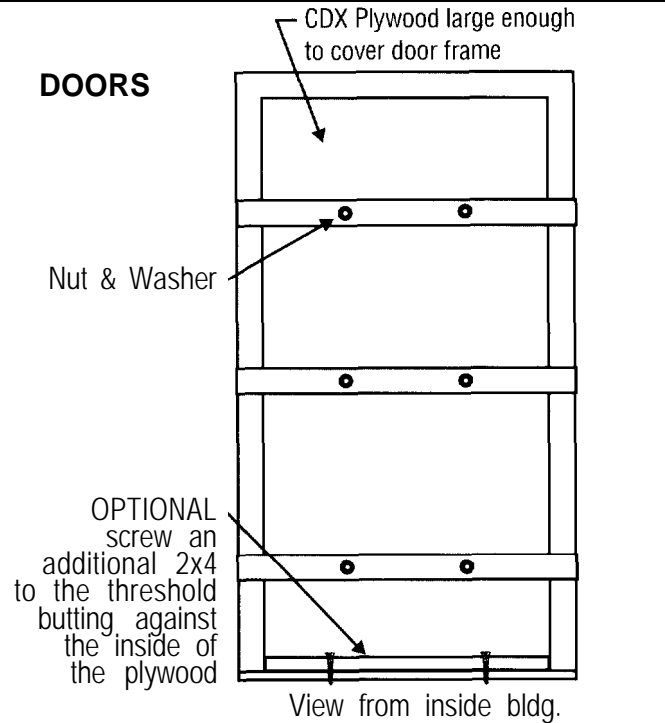
- A . 1/2" plywood, grade CDX and 2" x 4" by 8'
- construction grade lumber.
- B . 3/8" by 12" carriage bolts (rounded head on weather side).
- C . 3/8" construction grade nuts.
- D . Flat washers with an inside diameter large enough to bypass the wrench neck inside the carriage bolt head so no lift edge is available beneath an installed carriage bolt head.
- E . 1/2" diameter flat washers for installation beneath the nut inside the building.
- F . 1-5/8" (6d) galvanized or stainless steel ring-shank nails or comparable deck nails.

WINDOWS



Note: Outside view of window is same as view from outside door except with two 2x4 braces instead of three.

DOORS



A graphic featuring a target with concentric circles. A fire hose nozzle is positioned at the top right, pointing towards the center bullseye. The words "TARGET ARSON" are written in a large, bold, serif font across the middle of the target.

TARGET ARSON

To request arson prevention materials:

**National Arson Prevention Clearinghouse
16825 South Seton Avenue,
Emmitsburg, Maryland 21727
1-888-603-3100**

Materials available include:

- General Arson Prevention Literature
- Video: Fighting Church Arson
- Church Arson Prevention Literature
- Arson Prevention Brochures
- Juvenile Firesetter Brochures
- Coalition Building Handbook
- Arson Threat Assessment Guides for:
Communities, Churches, Buildings
- Information on Arson Classes and
Courses delivered by the National
Fire Academy

